

## *Worthy of Trust*

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Years back, there was a science fiction story based on the idea of spaceships that traveled by changing their frame of reference. They didn't need any fuel. All they needed to do was change the frame of reference and that was what made them travel. They would stay constantly in line with whatever their frame of reference was. In other words, if such a ship was on the Earth and its frame of reference was the Earth, it would stay on the Earth. If it changed its frame of reference to the Sun, it would zip away from the Earth at the same speed that the Earth was moving around the Sun. If the pilots changed the frame of reference to the center of the galaxy, you can imagine how fast and far it would go.

The main plot device for the story was that when the ship changed its frame of reference, everybody inside the ship would conk out—lose consciousness—for a little while, and then come back. Some of the people lost consciousness longer than others, which meant that those who came to first had an advantage. They could do all kinds of things while the other people in the ship were unconscious.

Of course, the nature of these ships is a metaphor for the mind. The mind frequently changes its frame of reference, sometimes so fast that we can't keep track it. In between each change, we conk out, lose track of where our old frame of reference was, and suddenly find ourselves in a new one. We rarely know how we got there.

Think about it. Sit down and try to trace through your train of thought, say, for the past five or ten minutes. Often you find it hard to do, because the mind was so thoroughly blacked out, even if it was just for a moment, when it went from one frame of reference to the next. Just as the people on the ship could do all kinds of dastardly things when their friends were conked out, the mind does all kinds of things as well. It can shape all kinds of worlds, throw up all kinds of walls around itself, so that you suddenly find yourself in a world where your basic values or the values that you claim don't have any power.

This is how people compartmentalize. They can do all kinds of things they wouldn't consciously justify. They suddenly find themselves in a world where, say, the principle of karma doesn't apply, so they feel they can do anything, think anything, and say anything they want. Then they find themselves in another frame of reference, and wonder: How could I have said that? How could I have done that?

This is why we sometimes sense that the mind is out of control. In other words, we don't have total control over our actions. This is basically why we can't trust ourselves.

This is a prime issue we have to work on as we meditate, because it means not only that we can't trust ourselves, but also that people around us can't trust us, either. So for our own good, for the good of the people around us, we have to learn how to break through these barriers, learn how to maintain consciousness every time the mind moves, so that we know why we're moving, where we're moving. Only then can we keep our values intact, always keep them in mind, so that we will act on the values that we really consciously believe in, and not hide our motivations away or put up walls or screens between our values and our actions.

So you start meditating and you find yourself suddenly blanking out. You're someplace else. Don't view it as a minor irritant. It's one of the most important issues in training the mind. You want to learn to watch for the signs that the mind is going to move, put up some walls, or pull up the curtain—as when they draw the curtain when they're presenting a play, between one act and the next. They let down the curtain, change the scenery, pull up the curtain, and there you are: someplace else. If you watched them changing scenery, it would destroy the illusion.

This is what the mind is trying to do: trying to maintain illusions. So watch for the signs that the curtain is about to come down. As soon as you realize that it's coming down, pull it back up again. Don't view this as a minor thing, and don't be surprised when it happens. It's been happening all along, and now you're simply becoming aware of how radically the mind can hide things from itself.

So be prepared. The more quickly you can sense when the mind is about to change its frame of reference, the easier it'll be to stay with your meditation object. This is why mindfulness has to be coupled with alertness. Mindfulness means keeping something in mind, remembering why you're here, what you should be doing. Alertness is checking on what you're doing to make sure that you keep your frame of reference in mind, that you're not losing it, that you're not preparing to jump off to something else.

The mind is often like an inchworm at the edge of a leaf. Part of it is on the leaf, but some of its little legs are waving around, hoping for another leaf to come along so that it can jump. So try to have a sense of when the legs of your mind start to wave around, looking for something else to think about, somewhere else to go. The signs are there—if you look for them. When you see them happening, then you can remind yourself: No, we're going to stay right here. Put the legs back

down on the original leaf. That way, you can become more and more in control of your mind. When you have more control of your mind, you can trust yourself more, not only as you're meditating but also in all of your activities. You can trust yourself; people around you can trust you as well.

This is one of the basic principles of the teaching. We take refuge frequently in the Triple Gem. What does that mean? We take the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha on one level as examples to follow; on another level, we internalize their virtues. We make the virtues of the Buddha our virtues, we build them into the mind. The virtues of the Dhamma become our virtues, we build them into the mind. The virtues of the noble Sangha: We become members of the noble Sangha. That way, we become not only a refuge for ourselves, but also for other people. They can trust us. This is one way which our practice connects with the practice of other people.

Often you hear it said that we try to develop a sense of oneness, or a sense of our interconnectedness. But what makes interconnection real, what makes interconnection valuable, is the issue of trust. If you simply try to feel one with other people but you don't really trust them, you don't have reasons to trust them, then it's just a sentimental idea. If they don't have reason to trust you, it's a sentimental idea as well. The basis for a really valuable sense of connection has to be trustworthiness, which means that you have to make your mind trustworthy. You have to get rid of all the walls and barriers, all the curtains inside your mind that make it devious. Once you can do that, you can trust yourself and other people can really trust you, too. The sense of barrier between you and them can get broken down as well.

So in breaking down the inner barriers, it's possible to break down outer barriers, not simply by cultivating a feeling of oneness or interconnectedness, but by giving people a reason to trust you, giving yourself a reason to trust yourself. You train the mind so that it really does become something in which you can take refuge, and the people around you can take refuge in you as well. That way, even when they have their lapses of mindfulness, they can trust you not to do anything underhanded.

So barriers are overcome by trust, and trust can be established only when you're trustworthy. The problem is these little gaps in the mind. These are the main barriers, so watch out for them. Learn to develop the continuity of awareness that can break through them, so that no matter what you're thinking about, a larger state of mind in which all your values are present is always there.

This is why we're practicing not only mindfulness, but also concentration, the concentration that the Buddha calls the enlarged mind, are expanded mind,

*mahaggatam cittam*, awareness filling the body, where thoughts can come and go, but that enlarged awareness is always there. It's the arena in which they come and go, an arena with no walls, no curtains. This is what we're working toward.